

**Congressman DeFazio firmly believes that it is an obligation of the federal government, not an option, to properly take care of the men and women who proudly serve in our nation's armed forces.** Throughout his time in Congress he has fought to ensure that the United States makes good on that obligation. In recent years Congress has passed long overdue funding increases for the VA, and DeFazio has always insisted that these funds translate into better service for Oregon Veterans.

These men and women proudly fought for their country. They should not have to have to battle bureaucrats at the VA here at home just to get the services that they have earned. Congressman DeFazio has consistently gone head to head with the VA and supported legislation to make sure that all veterans are able to access the services to which they are entitled without any hassle.

### **In the 111th Congress (2009-2010)**

- In April 2010, DeFazio introduced *H.R. 5185, the Fair Care for Military Families Act*, which would allow children to remain on their parents' TRICARE or CHAMPVA health insurance plan until age 26. Health care reform allows children to remain on their parents' civilian insurance plan until age 26. H.R. 5185 simply offers that same benefit to families covered by CHAMPVA or TRICARE. Provisions to extend TRICARE and CHAMPVA coverage until age 26 were ultimately included in the 2011 Department of Defense Authorization Act, which passed in the House with Congressman DeFazio's support.

- In November 2009, DeFazio introduced *H. Res. 925*, a bipartisan resolution to honor military aviators who were forced down in hostile territory and subsequently managed to evade or escape enemy capture. These aviators, many of them serving in WWII, have never received formal recognition from the Armed Services for their meritorious service in avoiding capture or in escaping from captivity. The bipartisan H. Res. 925 expresses congressional recognition for these airmen's accomplishments. It also directs the Secretaries of the military departments to consider such aviators for appropriate recognition within their branch of the Armed Forces.

- In July 2009, DeFazio introduced the *Troops' Soft Landing, Employment, and Rural Transportation Act*. This bill provides for a soft landing for National Guard and Reserve troops by ensuring that returning service members have a firm safety net when they return from war. By allowing them to remain on active duty for up to 90 days, collect pay, and access reintegration services, this legislation will help ease the adjustment from combat to civilian life. Currently Guard and Reserve troops have only a few days to readjust before returning to civilian life. The bill also provides counseling for the troops for those 90 days. The bill also expands the Work Opportunity Tax Credit for veterans to provide a better tax credit for businesses who hire veterans from high unemployment areas like the 4<sup>th</sup>

Congressional district. Finally, the bill authorizes the VA to establish a grant program to provide transportation to veterans in highly rural areas. In rural communities across the nation, veterans rely on the generosity of family and veterans service organizations to transport them to VA facilities for appointments, exams, treatments, and testing services.

- In June 2009, DeFazio introduced *H.R. 2673, the Equal Treatment for Widows of Wartime Veterans Act*, which corrects a discrepancy in the pension benefits paid to widows of wartime veterans. The bill will simply make the base surviving spouse benefit equal to the wartime vet benefit.

### **DeFazio voted for several bills to improve Veterans access to benefits:**

- *H.R. 1016- Veterans Health Care Budget Reform & Transparency Act (Signed into Law 10/22/2009)*, a top priority of veterans' groups, authorizing Congress to approve VA medical care appropriations one year in advance to ensure reliable and timely funding and prevent politics from ever delaying VA health care funding. The annual struggle to pass the VA budget in a timely manner severely reduces the VA's ability to provide quality care to veterans and hampers the VA's ability to recruit well-trained medical professionals, maintain operational facilities, and acquire new equipment. Ultimately, our nation's veterans pay the price in poor services. The VA needs an assured and advance source of funding to meet the growing demand for care and services. H.R. 1016 will help to provide that assurance.

- *S.1963- Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services* (Signed into Law 5/5/2010), landmark legislation providing help to caregivers of disabled, ill or injured veterans, and improving VA health services for women veterans. The bill also expands mental health services available through the VA, helping to ensure that veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are able to receive timely and proper mental health and PTSD care. Establishes

rural mental health centers and other programs to serve rural veterans.

- *H.R. 4899- Agent Orange BENEFITS* (Signed into Law 7/29/2010), providing long overdue disability benefits to more than 150,000 Vietnam veterans and survivors for exposure to Agent Orange. The VA planned to recognize ischemic heart disease, Parkinson's disease, and B-cell leukemia as being linked to Agent Orange exposure, and H.R. 4899 finally provides the funding for disability benefits for Agent Orange vets with these ailments.

### **DeFazio cosponsored:**

- *H.R. 23, the Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2009*
- *H. Res. 111, Establishing a Select Committee on POW and MIA Affairs*
- *H.R. 333, the Disable Veterans Tax Termination Act*, would finally provide an overarching solution to the issue of concurrent receipt. The bill corrects several inequities by allowing veterans with a service-connected disability of less than 50% to claim both retired pay and disability compensation. It also extends Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay to disability retirees with less than 20 years of creditable service.
- *H.R. 613, the Military Retiree Survivor Comfort Act* – legislation to forgive any overpayment of military retired pay for the month following the death of the veteran, allowing the surviving spouse to keep the full months benefit so they can mourn without less concern about paying bills.
- [H.R. 775](#), *the Military Surviving Spouses Equity Act* - would repeal current law that stipulates a dollar-for-dollar reduction in the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) for each dollar of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) a surviving spouse receives.
- *H.R. 816, the Military Retirees Health Care Protection Act*, legislation that prohibits the

Pentagon from unilaterally increasing the out-of-pocket costs for military retirees seeking health care

- *H. [R. 2389](#)*, the *Health Care for Members of the Armed Forces Exposed to Chemical Hazards Act of 2009*, provides that soldiers exposed to chemical hazards be offered a complete medical check-up.

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### In the 110th Congress (2007- 2008)

- In June 2008, DeFazio cosponsored the *Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2007*, which was incorporated into H.R. 2642, the Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2008, and was signed into law. The Post 9/11 bill is the greatest overhaul of the G.I. Bill in over 20 years, covering the cost of a college education at a public university for qualifying veterans. Additionally, the legislation provides benefits to Reserve and National Guard members reflecting the length and service of these citizen soldiers. It also provides soldier and veterans with the option of transferring education benefits to their spouses and children.

- In August, 2008, DeFazio voted in favor of the *Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008* which prohibits foreclosure for nine months after military service and provides a much needed increase to the VA home loan limit. DeFazio supported the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008 that revamped the VA home loan program by enabling more veterans to refinance their existing high-risk loans with VA loans and he voted to expand homeownership opportunities by making thousands of veterans eligible for low-interest loans.

- DeFazio *voted to increase the budget for veterans' health care and service by \$16.3 billion dollars* during the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. The increases supported by Congressman DeFazio in the last two years are more than increases in Congress over the preceding 12 years.

- DeFazio voted in address veteran health care treatment and access. DeFazio helped pass the *Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act* to address the troubling increase of suicide in our veteran community. The bill offers comprehensive services to veterans and sets up a 24-hour toll-free suicide hotline. The hotline has already served more than 30,000 veterans, family members, and friends